

Bipartisan legislation would help bring outdated mileage reimbursement rates up to speed with current federal employee rates; stop the shortchanging of America's disabled vets

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Augusta & Savannah - At press conferences in Savannah and Augusta, Georgia Congressman John Barrow (12th District) today joined groups of local veterans to discuss new bipartisan legislation he's introduced to help bring some equality and fairness to the mileage reimbursement rates that America's disabled veterans are receiving.

Since most VA clinics in Georgia provide only primary care and mental health services, many of the state's disabled veterans are forced to travel hundreds of miles to either Atlanta or Augusta to receive specialty treatments for injury-related care. Under federal law, eligible disabled veterans who travel for this care are entitled to have their mileage reimbursed.

Currently, those veterans are reimbursed at only \$0.11 per mile - less than one fourth of the \$0.48 per mile reimbursement that federal employees presently receive for their travel.

"When an American soldier is wounded or permanently disabled, our country makes a promise that we'll provide them with quality, affordable medical treatment," Barrow said to a crowd of over a dozen vets at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum in Savannah. "But over the years, America has been shortchanging thousands of our disabled vets - making it harder for them to be able to afford the treatment they have a right to receive."

Due to increases in gas prices following Hurricane Katrina, the mileage reimbursement rate for federal employees was increased to \$0.48 per mile on September 1st, up from the previous rate of \$0.40 per mile.

However, the mileage reimbursement rate for disabled veterans was not increased at that time.

In fact, that rate has not been raised in nearly 30 years, since 1977.

"It's inexcusable that Congress has not raised the reimbursement rate for disabled vets since 1977," Barrow said from out front of the VA Medical Center in downtown Augusta. "In my mind, that's the equivalent of repeal by neglect."

Barrow's bill, entitled the *Disabled Veterans Fairness Act* (H.R. 4025), would bring the outdated mileage reimbursement in line with the current requirements for federal employees.

In addition, the bill would:

- Ensure that eligible disabled veterans continue to receive the current General Services Administration (GSA) rate, equal to the reimbursement rate that federal employees receive when driving privately-owned vehicles.

- Eliminate the \$3 each way deductible that eligible disabled veterans are forced to pay when requesting mileage reimbursement.

- Mandate that the money for this program come from new and separate federal funds, so it's not competing with other necessary VA programs.

"This bill is a matter of fairness for disabled veterans," Barrow continued.
"These are the men and women who made a lifelong sacrifice fighting for our freedoms.
And it's time we fought for them."

Barrow's efforts to update the mileage reimbursement program have already received the endorsement of two national veteran's associations: The *Disabled American Veterans* and *Paralyzed Veterans of America*.

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In letters to Congressman Barrow,
the

Disabled American Veterans

said that the bill "would rectify an historic inequality in this program that affects sick and disabled veterans," while the

Paralyzed Veterans of America

wrote that "this legislation will truly help our most seriously disabled veterans."

When the bill was formally introduced before Congress on Friday, October 7th, it had already been cosponsored by a handful of members, including Republican Congressman Walter Jones of North Carolina, who represents families and soldiers from Camp Lejeune, and Congressman Lane Evans of Illinois, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

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